The Black Cat

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August 1902

A Bridegroom's Substitute.
$250 Prize Story.
Mary Van Brunt Hunter.

An Unsolicited Custodianship.
David Bruce Fitzgerald

The Double Wedding at Section Thirty.
H. A. Crafts.

The Thousandth Chance.
Richard Barker Shelton.

Rance.
$125 Prize Story.
Bland Brunner Huddleston.

5 CENTS

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BUDLEIGH SATTERTON,
S. DEVON, 3 May, 1902.

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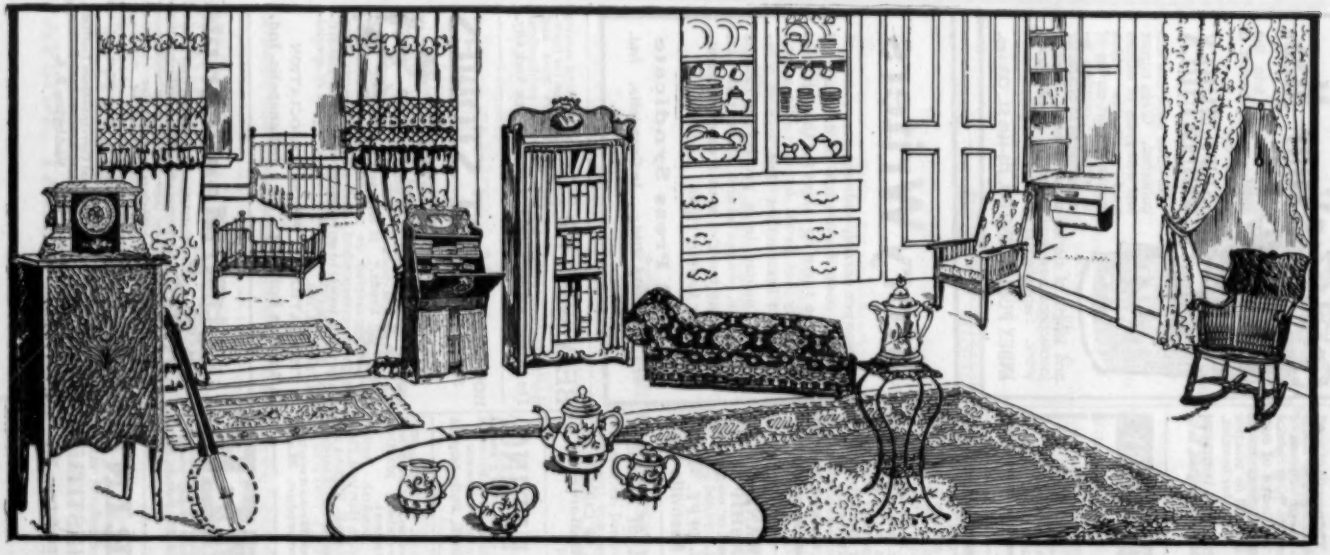

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A Bridegroom's Substitute.*

BY MARY VAN BRUNT HUNTER.

THE parlor car Uarda was last in the vestibuled train. Even beneath the shadow of the station roof its glories of brass and nickel-plate, of shining paint and varnish, gleamed with but slightly diminished splendor. At the front platform stood a porter, immaculate in uniform, ebony in complexion. Within, the passengers were arranging their belongings and making themselves at home in their sections.

The hands of the station clock pointed to the moment of departure. The final signal had been given. A short, incisive whistle sounded from the engine. Placing his step on the platform the porter waved a friendly adieu to the white-capped cook on a neighboring dining-car, when through the gate came hurrying a belated pair. They dashed breathlessly across intervening tracks, reaching the Uarda at the first slow revolution of the wheels. Seizing the girl on either side, her companion and the porter swung her to the vestibule. The man swiftly followed. Catching bags and umbrellas, the porter scrambled hastily after. Cheers of congratulation came from the cook and waiters. The interested onlookers smiled and again pursued their devious ways. The wheels revolved more and more swiftly, a shrill, prolonged

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $250 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending February 26, 1902.

whistle pierced the air, a bell clanged loudly, and the train rolled out from beneath the station roof.

"Close call, dat, sah!" grinned the porter, as the girl, flushed and laughing, paused in the narrow passage to adjust her hair and hat.

"You're right, George," answered the man. "Here."

Into the porter's outstretched hand dropped something large and shining.

With thanks he slipped it in his pocket.

"Spec's dey oughter be some rice on dat, sah," he added, his practised eye glancing swiftly over the garments of pristine newness, the bags plainly in service for the first time, the snugly-rolled umbrellas. Only the golf bags and their contents showed evidence of use.

"Right again, George," laughed the man easily. "Take these traps to the drawing-room. I engaged one here somewhere."

He stepped forward to the girl, who was pinning a final rebellious lock.

"Wasn't that a race for life?" she said, with enjoyment. "Didn't we sprint across those tracks? Every one was laughing, but I don't care. We're off, and they're all standing around in the hall with their hands full of silly rice and old shoes. How foolish they will feel when they find we are gone!"

They walked the length of the car to the drawing-room, followed by admiring, interested glances. Both were young, well-looking and well-attired. The man's suit and top coat were plainly the product of a Fifth Avenue tailor. The cloth gown of the girl fitted her slim figure with an elegance giving proof that on the inner belt, inscribed in flowing gilt lines, might be read a name famous in the fashionable world.

"How delightful to go off like this!" she continued, as they settled themselves in their compartment. "If they had all come with us to the train everybody would know that we are just starting on our wedding journey. As it is, no one will ever dream of such a thing."

"Certainly not!" he agreed, mendaciously. "Not a grain of rice about us" — "as the porter observed," he was about to add, but checked himself in time.

"You were so clever to think of the back stairway and alley,"

she said, with admiration. "And the second carriage, too. I suppose the other one is still waiting in front." She laughed in sheer delight.

"I trust some fool hasn't tied white ribbons on the trunks," he rejoined, meditatively. "People are such idiots at these times. When Maude and Tom went away some one sent a pair of turtle doves, in a cage adorned with white ribbons, to be presented to them on the car. It was to escape these pleasing attentions that I said we would take the Philadelphia train, and here we are headed up the Hudson."

"I'm glad you gave me time to let the girls at Vassar know. They will be at the station, I'm sure — the six left of our 'Octa Gamma Club' since Elizabeth and I graduated. I did want them here to-day, but papa is *so* opposed to large weddings. And then between us we have such a troop of relatives," she finished with a sigh.

"Yes, it's wearing," he responded, feelingly. "Well, the ordeal is over, and we'll have simply an ideal wedding journey, Katherine — no swell hotels full of bores, no dinner toilets and hops. Just the Adirondacks, some fishing and hunting, and a try at the links somewhere. By the way, did you pack your old tramping suit?"

"Yes, indeed; and I suppose you will live in those hideous hunting clothes. It will be just as it was last summer, when we first found out — "

"That we were made for one another." He finished with his arm about her, her head nestled to his shoulder in the attitude favored by travelling brides since time immemorial, and they lost themselves in delightful reminiscences.

Sometime later, in the midst of tender "do you remembers," her hand sought her hair.

"It is shaking!" she said, rising. "Besides, the conductor might come any minute. Please give me my little bag. I must make myself presentable. Our mad rush was too much for the elaborate coiffure that went with my wedding gown."

She stood before the mirror, one hand removing hat and hairpins, the other outstretched for the bag. He glanced at the empty racks, then along the cushions.

"Why, I don't see it, dear."

Katherine turned swiftly. One long waving brown lock fell on her shoulder. Her eyes were startled.

"But it must be there!" She swooped to the suit cases standing on the floor, dislodged golf bags and umbrellas from their resting places, glanced in her turn at the racks. With the energy of increasing alarm, she shook his overcoat, her jacket, and finally the hat she had just taken from her head, as though the bag might be concealed among its roses. Then she faced him tragically.

"Howard! it had my jewelry — everything! the lovely sunburst you gave me — auntie's pearl necklace! What *shall* we do?"

The situation revealed itself more gradually to his slower comprehension.

"All your jewelry?" he began in true masculine fashion. "Why did you bring it? to the mountains in June! No — I didn't mean that," he added in quick repentance. "Of course —"

"Oh, I don't know why!" she moaned. "We rushed so — I didn't think. I just put them all in the bag with my purse — Howard, aren't you going to *do* something?"

"Where did you have it last? Think, dear."

"I had it — oh, let me see!" she paused to summon all her forces. "In the carriage; no, running through the station it was in my hand. Wasn't it?" she questioned him fiercely. "Oh, dear, I can't tell! Don't you remember?"

"But, dearest," he tried to quiet her. "Be calm — you are so agitated —"

"Agitated! Calm!" she repeated his words in scorn. "And lose all my beautiful things? No, we must stop the train —"

She turned wildly to the door, but he caught her in his arms.

"My dear child, you mustn't! With your hair hanging. It would make a shocking scene — we would be in all the papers. I will telegraph. Oh, they will find it in no time! I believe they are stopping now — yes, I'll wire from this station!" He seized his hat as a warning whistle sounded far ahead. "Stay here, Katherine; I'll be back in a moment." The door closed behind his departing figure.

Katherine fastened her dishevelled locks in place slowly, with many distrait pauses. Try as she would to remember, her mind was an absolute blank in regard to the bag. How unutterably stupid she had been! just like the women one reads of in the so-called funny papers, who jump off street-cars backward and go about blandly poking their parasols into other people's eyes. It was beyond hope that she would ever see her lovely things again.

And why did not Howard return? She opened the door wide as though to hasten him. The telegraph poles were flying by with increasing rapidity. The little station was already miles behind. Seconds count fast on the Empire State Express.

With unseeing eyes Katherine was gazing toward the Palisades when the words, "Tickets, please," reached her ear.

The conductor was rearranging a handful he had already collected. He repeated his request mechanically. Then, as she did not comply, he glanced up sharply.

"I — Howard — the gentleman who is with me — I mean, my husband," she began lamely and concluded in desperation. "He has the tickets, I suppose," she added with hauteur.

"Is he forward?" asked the conductor with official brevity.

"I don't know — yes, he must be. He got off at the last station to send a telegram."

"Got off to send a telegram!" he repeated. "Have you any idea he got on again? Dobbs' Ferry isn't on our schedule — we were signalled; some trouble on the track this morning — but we were detained only thirty seconds."

"It can't be he was *left!*" she exclaimed in incredulous dismay. "Don't tell me so! Why, what should I do?"

"If he's on this train he must have stepped lively." The conductor spoke with conviction. "But don't be uneasy. Trains are passing constantly. He can catch another in twenty minutes."

Small consolation in that, reflected Katherine, bewildered at the avalanche of misfortunes overwhelming this "ideal wedding journey." He could not catch *this* train, which was annihilating space at the rate of a mile a minute. A swift search of the silver chatelaine bag at her belt revealed her resources. One half dollar, one quarter, two dimes and a postage stamp. Surely she could not travel far on the sum of available assets. The conductor was pro-

ceeding calmly with his duties. Would he take one of her rings, or a pin? she wondered. What rules and regulations had a soulless corporation for a desperate case like this?

At that moment came striding down the car aisle a man, tall, blond, handsome. With a feeling akin to rapture Katherine recognized Jack Patterson, playmate of her childhood, beau of her dancing-school days, chum of her brother and friend and neighbor always.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried advancing. Then, as a nearby passenger regarded her curiously over his newspaper, she retreated, sinking to a seat in the stateroom with relief too great for words.

Jack followed.

"How delightful to meet you, Katherine!" he began. "I saw you boarding this train at the last moment. Gave us a false scent, didn't you, saying that you were going Philadelphia way? I'm bound for Albany; Van Zandt's wedding comes off to-night. June's the month, isn't it? Where's Howard, the lucky beggar? I'll take myself off as soon as I've wished you both all the good that's going."

"Oh, Jack, if you wait for Howard!" exclaimed the bride of the woeful countenance. "I'm so glad to see you, you can't imagine! You will help me, won't you, Jack? He's gone! I'm in such a dreadful predicament."

Tears of relief shone in her eyes, and Jack's mystified expression brought hysterical laughter to her lips.

Jack's handsome face grew more and more uneasy. Had Howard — no! impossible! Yet here was one of the dearest girls in the world, married but two short hours, alone, in tears, appealing for aid. What could it mean?

"I lost my bag," gasped Katherine, struggling with mingled emotions. "All my jewelry and my purse. Then Howard got off to telegraph, and now — I've lost him!"

Jack stared — then joined heartily in her laughter.

"Well, that's not so serious. For a moment I was afraid — well — hum — ha — let us see what can be done. And this is all the money you have?" Another peal of laughter at the contents of her hand. "Not enough for a bunch of violets. Really, it's a farcical situation. I'm glad you can see the humor of it."

"I couldn't until you came," she rejoined. "But now it really *is* funny, isn't it? A bride taking her wedding journey all by her lonely self."

"I'll go interview the trainmen," said Jack. "Then I think I'll take my turn at the wires."

He passed through the car smiling, as he composed a message calculated to soothe the troubled soul of the bridegroom. At the door he met the conductor bearing a yellow envelope handed on board at a recent slow-down. It was addressed to Mrs. Howard Woodrow, and Jack hastened with it to her side. The message read:

Got left all right don't worry come on next train wait at Hotel Kenmore Albany HOWARD

"Good advice — that don't worry," quoth Jack. "Let us proceed to follow it. I'll get a cribbage-board and some cards, and we'll drive dull care away. You used to beat me once, Katherine, before Howard monopolized all your time."

The conductor pocketed Jack's cigars, the porter fingered his dollar with affection. Together they grinned at the situation, agreeing it was "on the bridegroom." By some subtle telepathic influence the state of affairs became known to the other passengers, who watched the progress of the little comedy with obvious interest and amusement. More frequently than usual did the porter's duties call him near the drawing-room, and his eyes rolled sympathetically in that direction each time he passed the open door.

"De bride's commencin' to take notice," he cheerfully informed the conductor on his return from one of these tours of investigation. "Dey'se playin' cyards and laffin' to beat de ban'. Spec's t'udder fellah better catch dat fust train suah, or he fin' heself cut out."

And "t'udder fellah," pacing the platform at Dobbs' Ferry with impatient feet, was extracting what comfort he might from the following telegram:

Ah there Dobbs' Ferry wish you blissful honeymoon Katherine O K I'm your substitute write when you find time JACK PATTERSON
P S Don't worry

The time passed quickly. The familiar hills about Poughkeepsie came in sight, and Katherine's heart misgave her as she remembered the message she had sent "the girls."

"They will all be at the station, six of them. How frightfully awkward to explain; and how they will laugh!"

"Don't explain," advised Jack. "Say nothing about it. Just hug 'em all around and talk so fast they can't ask questions."

"Could I carry that off, I wonder?" she queried doubtfully.

"Sure! If they persist in asking, tell them — they don't know Howard, do they? — well, then tell them he is shy and doesn't want to come out."

The speed of the train slackened. Katherine, peering through the window, caught a glimpse of the station door. The girls were there. She quailed.

"Now for it! Screw up your courage!" cheered Jack.

"What shall I say? Oh, Jack, come with me and help me out!"

Jack followed, nothing loath. A chorus of laughing voices greeted Katherine. She was caught in a vortex of shirt-waists and summer hats, kissed, embraced and congratulated.

"But where's the bridegroom?" some one asked.

Katherine laughed, and blushed guiltily.

"Oh, he's shy," she began; then hesitated, casting a look for aid toward Jack in the doorway. The eyes of the girls followed hers and Jack encountered a fusillade of admiring glances.

"Shy, is he?" cried one brave spirit. "Then let us kiss him for his mother, girls!"

Jack found this mistake most diverting, and advanced unabashed to the charge. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, he gaily reflected. The girls were fresh and pretty, it would really be a pity to deprive them of their joke, and since he had been invited — presto! their half-hearted greetings were met with an ardor and vehemence truly astonishing in a newly-made bridegroom, supposed to have eyes — and lips — for but one. With gasps, laughter and shrieks the girls beat a hasty retreat.

Suddenly amid the confusion Jack's eyes met those of a tall brunette on the outskirts of the group, and his heart stood still. They were large, dark eyes with long-lashed lids, and the red mouth beneath them was set in scornful curves. Jack had seen those eyes, that mouth, before. He had dreamed of and sought them ever since. And now to find them when he was playing

the clown like this! All his gaiety vanished, leaving him pale and grave. In that disdainful face he seemed to read:

"And you are Katherine's chosen one! A *farceur*, a romping fool! What could she see in you?"

With a wild idea of explanation he turned toward her.

"All aboard!" called a voice.

"Be careful; you'll be left!" cried Katherine's agitated tones; and Jack sprang on board feeling very small indeed.

"Who is the tall girl?" he asked as his companion waved a last adieu.

"Oh, that's Elizabeth — Elizabeth Reed, my dearest chum. I was so surprised to see her. She was my classmate, and has been in Europe nearly all the year. They landed Monday and she's here to see her sister, the pretty dark-haired one. Elizabeth is the sweetest thing! And isn't she a beauty?"

"Yes, she is a beauty," he agreed briefly, inwardly raging at himself.

"And, oh, Jack!" Katherine burst into merry laughter as they again reached the stateroom. "Wasn't it too funny? They thought you were Howard! Isn't that a joke?"

Jack's answering mirth was hollow, and Katherine's laughter soon ceased, discouraged by his lack of enthusiasm. He sat preoccupied beside her. This was a scurvy trick that Fate had played him. To fall in love with a face, as he had done one night six months before, in Paris; to chase it over the Continent, to haunt cathedrals, galleries, palaces — all spots, in fact, that most attract tourists, and never to find it again; this had been bad enough. But to come upon it when he was acting the part of a cheerful idiot, a facetious fool — and a married one at that! Jack set his teeth, and to himself said things quite unfit for publication.

Katherine, beneath her lashes, studied him attentively.

"Jack," she said finally, "do you know, I've always thought Elizabeth the very girl for you?"

He kindled.

"You know," she continued, joying in the consciousness of having applied the match to the combustible spot, "to begin with, you are both so tall and handsome."

He bowed with a deprecating shrug.

"Oh, yes — it isn't worth while to deny it. You know it as well as any one; you've been told it often enough. Then you're so blond and she so *brune*. You're so gay and she so dignified. Certainly it would be an ideal match. When we are settled in our house next winter I shall have her come to visit, and you shall meet her."

"Next winter! As well next century," groaned Jack's despairing soul. Then, fearing his depression was too obvious, he made a desperate struggle to rally.

"Suppose we have another game," he suggested briskly. "We ought to play the rubber before we reach Albany. Do you mind if I leave you after I've seen you made comfortable at the Kenmore?"

Katherine laughed. "Better label me 'To be left until called for,'" she said. "I seem to have developed such a talent for getting into trouble."

"You see, I'm a train later than I promised, as it is," he explained, replacing the ivory pegs in the board and taking up the cards.

. . . . . .

Jack had filled the office of best man too many times to feel any consciousness of his position when, that evening, he and the groom entered the crowded church from the vestry. It was the same old story. Pews filled with well-gowned women, a sprinkling of men, rustling fans, subdued murmur of voices, flowers, palms, strains of the wedding march. Waiting at the chancel rail with impassive countenance, he viewed the advancing bridesmaids with the eye of a connoisseur. Six pretty girls they were, walking with a dignity befitting their state; and far behind them, alone, in gown of trailing, filmy white, tall and stately — Jack's heart gave a sudden leap. It was she!

Could this be the bride? he queried for one anguished instant. No; the great armful of American Beauty roses that she carried reassured him; and enhanced by their glow of rich color were the masses of midnight hair, the crimson lips, the deep, dark eyes that met his eager gaze with one of disdainful recognition.

From that moment Jack became an automaton, fulfilling his duties mechanically. He was dimly conscious of a clergyman and

a service, but for aught he knew the bride might have been habited in black. With mingled rapture and trepidation he walked at the side of the beautiful maid of honor as the bridal party left the church.

In the vestibule some one essayed an introduction, explaining the late hour of arrivals.

"We have met before," said Miss Reed's low contralto. Then she turned to Jack and her accusing gaze pierced him through.

"How is Katherine this evening?"

So glacial was her tone that Jack felt a sudden shiver of dismay. Was he really guilty? Had he married Katherine this morning, murdered her this afternoon, and concealed his crime, as this young woman's manner seemed to suggest? Meekly he replied:

"Quite well, I trust."

"But you do not know?" in accents of surprise. "And — since when has it become the fashion for a bridegroom to act as best man?"

Jack's crushed spirit reasserted itself. "There are matrons of honor, sometimes. Why not a benedict?" he hazarded, and immediately became aware that his sprightly joke had fallen upon stony ground.

With demeanors of studied inattention they walked together to the carriage, where two bridesmaids were awaiting her. As Jack held the open door, she flashed him an inscrutable glance beneath lowered eyelids. He bent toward her quickly.

"Let me tell you," he said, rapidly, "this evening — later — let me explain all that happened to-day."

"Oh, really — it isn't worth while," she replied, with airy indifference. "I'm not the least interested in the travelling experiences of a Hobson."

Jack closed the door with a somewhat vicious bang, and the carriage rolled away.

Amid the throng of wedding guests that evening he met with no better success. Miss Reed proved an adept in the gentle art of evading a tête-à-tête. Moreover, she seemed to find a malicious pleasure in affording him apparent opportunities, which she nipped in the bud with graceful nonchalance. When he bade her good-night he had reached a state where he told himself she was a

soulless being, that Katherine's adjective "sweet" was a misnomer, that he hoped he should never see her again.

Did she read his thought? In her eyes lurked a tantalizing smile, and she said, softly:

"And that — explanation?"

But Jack hardened his heart, and bowing low passed on.

The following morning he called at the Kenmore. The birds had flown. "Mr. and Mrs. Woodrow went north at nine o'clock," said the clerk, "but there was a letter; yes, for Mr. John Worthington Patterson."

Jack dropped into a chair in the lobby and opened his letter with languid interest. Perfunctory thanks, he supposed, and really they were delighted to be rid of him. They would not give him another thought while they were gone. Van Zandt, too, with his bride — what did he care, away with the girl he loved? A sensation of loneliness smote Jack's heart. Weddings were certainly dreadful bores. These selfish creatures, pairing off and forming little domestic trusts, left their friends quite out in the cold. Bitterly he agreed that the world was hollow. Then slowly he drew the letter from its envelope and read:

> DEAR OLD MAN: — Your telegram, which was in the way of rubbing it in on the unfortunate, is forgiven in consideration of your kindly offices, and the realistic acting with which you personated yours truly on the journey. The girls all believed you were It, with the sole exception of Elizabeth Reed, who came up from Poughkeepsie with me last night. No doubt you met her at Van's wedding. She has known me a year and had seen you before somewhere — Paris, I think she said. Between ourselves, she seems to consider you a passably decent-looking sort of a chap, but somewhat conceited, and a trifle too promiscuous in your osculatory habits. It will take a little time to square yourself on that last count — you know that's the one thing women can't stand. As Katherine says, you and Elizabeth would make a "lovely pair." Try it, my lovely one — and when you are as happy as I am now, let me be the first to bless you, my children. HOWARD.
>
> P. S. The bag was found in Katherine's dressing-room, where she had carefully concealed it for fear of rice.

Jack sprang from his chair, cramming the letter into his pocket. She remembered him, then! She had really noticed him that night at the theatre — in Paris! Yet — so incomprehensible are the ways of women — though he had gazed until ashamed of his rudeness, she had never once seemed to glance his way. And that asinine performance yesterday — no wonder she thought him

a conceited jackanapes who deserved punishment. But, perhaps, if he tried again —

As he reached the sidewalk he glanced at his watch. Half-past eleven. Surely it was his duty to call on Van Zandt's mother and sister before returning to New York. Incidentally, Miss Reed, who was staying with them. He walked briskly. The old town of Albany assumed its most picturesque guise. How blue the sky! how bright the sun! Almost he found himself quoting, "What is so rare as a day in June?" Ideal weather for wedding journeys. He wished Howard and Katherine, Van Zandt and his bride, the happiest of honeymoons. They all deserved the best, he thought, with a warm gush of enthusiastic friendship.

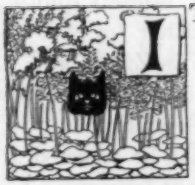
Thus, beaming alike on the just and the unjust, he reached the handsome old-fashioned mansion of the Van Zandt family.

On the wide porch, in a bevy of chattering girls, he found her — and it seemed to him that the bright morning paled before her glowing beauty.

And oh, wonder of wonders; joy and rapture! She came to greet him, giving him her soft white hand with propitiatory smiles, and a bantering friendly light in her glorious eyes.

An Unsolicited Custodianship.*

BY DAVID BRUCE FITZGERALD.



IT was in the month of October, 1887, that Hugh Sprague and I were, for eleven days, the custodians of one of the most valuable objects in the world; and during most of that time our sole desire was to lose it or give it away. More than once Hugh expressed the wish that he had our precious possession on the deck of a liner in mid-ocean, with a bar of pigiron attached to it by a stout cord. The impracticable nature of this longing will be seen when I say that at the period of our experience as guardians of the great treasure we were in the midst of a desert — that of Bisharien, which lies between the Nile and the Red Sea.

It would lengthen my story tediously to relate the whys and wherefores of the fact that Hugh and I were "doing" Egypt in a way which went beyond the tourist notion of a visit to the Alexandrian Museum, three days in Cairo, a donkey ride to the Pyramids and back again to the steamer. We pretended that our ascent of the Nile was in the interest of scientific investigation; but if the information possessed by antiquarians has ever been enlarged by any researches of ours we have yet to receive their acknowledgments. I prefer to be frank, and set it down to my comrade's spirit for adventure, that the evening of the twentieth of October found us encamped about one hundred miles southeast of Nabesh, and almost in the middle of that wide pass which connects the Desert of Bisharien with that of Nubia.

The notion of making an overland journey, touching the shores of the Red Sea and returning to the river again at a point to be determined by circumstances, occurred to us as we lounged on the deck of a Nile boat, between Cheneh and El Kab. The suggestion, once in Hugh's mind, could not be dislodged; and I finally

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consented to the plan, on condition that we were able to secure the services of Hady Kasim, who, the captain of the dhow assured us, was the most reliable and resourceful desert guide in all Egypt. This man made his headquarters at Assouan and, when we arrived at that place, we sent for him. The famous guide, a weazened little fellow, with a noticeably intelligent face, was not long in presenting himself and we soon managed to strike a bargain. To my surprise, Hady Kasim spoke excellent, if somewhat stilted, English. When I remarked on this he informed us that he had lived for five years in Cairo and had also acted as scout for the great English Lord who marched to the relief of Gordon.

Under the efficient superintendence of Hady Kasim, preparations for our desert journey were soon made, and, two days later, we took the road to Berenice. Thence we turned southward, through a country indescribably desolate — a vast, gently rolling sea of sand — the occasional oases appearing to be islands rising out of an expanse of yellow water. Three weeks of this, Hugh himself confessed, was quite enough; and, when we reached the southern border of Bisharien, with another, larger desert opening before us, we decided to turn westward, our guide advising us that we might reach the river again in about ten days. Wady Halfa was the objective point he mentioned, and we assured him that the sooner we arrived there the better pleased we would be.

It was then the twentieth of October. On the evening of that day, after a sweltering march, we were sitting before our little tent, enjoying a refreshing breeze which came with the sunset. A visitor was not in all our thoughts, but the unexpected sometimes happens, even in the most remote places. A solitary Arab suddenly appeared on the border of a neighboring palm grove and, after a short pause for inspection, came rapidly toward us. He carried a spear in his right hand and under his left arm there was a cylindrical, canvas-covered package. I noticed that our caller was unusually dusty and dishevelled; but, as he struck his spear upright in the ground and, standing directly before us, bowed profoundly, the native grace and dignity of the desert dweller were visible in every movement.

"Sit down," I said, with a gesture the Arab interpreted. "Hi! Kasim, come here and talk to our friend."

Hady, I suspect, was already peeping around the corner of the tent, for he appeared in a moment and addressed our visitor in words which were, of course, sufficiently unintelligible to us; a knowledge of modern Egyptian not being numbered among our educational acquirements. At first, indeed, the two natives seemed to experience difficulty in understanding each other, but presently they found some dialect with which both were familiar, and then the conversation became voluble enough.

"Sahibs," said our guide, turning to us at the first convenient opportunity, "this man says his name is Aboo Ben Abbas, that he comes from the north and that his face is set toward Suakim, which lies to the south. He desires to be informed of the direction in which we journey."

"Tell him," Hugh replied, "that we have had enough sand and sun to last an average American for life and that we are going to take the shortest cuts to Wady Halfa."

As this was interpreted to our caller, I saw a passing gleam of satisfaction light in his dark eyes. He was probably conscious of my observation, for the next moment his attitude became indifference itself. Turning away his head, he gazed listlessly out over the desert, as though to assure us that he had no further interest in our doings. The mood, however, was transient; and presently the Arab was speaking again to our guide. For a good quarter of an hour the conversation continued, until interrupted by an impatient exclamation from my comrade, who wanted to know what it was all about.

"Sahibs," said Hady Kasim, "this man desires to ask of your Excellencies a great service. On the further bank of the Nile, and just opposite the town of Wady Halfa, there is a small village. One who traverses the single street, running back from the water, comes at last to a group of three houses. They are small and stand somewhat by themselves. Beyond them there are no more houses. In the dwelling between the other two lives a man whose name is Aboul Daulah. He may be known by the signs that there is a deep scar on his left cheek and that the thumb of his left hand is missing. He who sits before us wishes to know whether the foreign Sahibs will undertake to deliver to that man the package or roll he has in his hands. He also offers to compensate your

servant for watching over it in the journey and for taking care that it is not exposed to the light of the sun, which might injure the delicate fabrics it contains."

"Certainly," I said, Hugh nodding his head affirmatively. "Tell our friend that we will be glad to do him the favor. We must stop at Wady Halfa a couple of days to rest and dispose of our horses, and it will only be a lark to cross the river and deliver the package. Take the bundle, Kasim, and throw it in the tent."

After this there was much bowing, gesturing and exchange of jargon. A gold piece found its way to the hand of our dragoman. The Arab, uttering profuse expressions of gratitude, departed and soon disappeared in the darkness that had fallen. The whole incident was so trivial that we did not give it a second thought. I do not remember that it was mentioned again until a later occurrence recalled it.

"Have the Sahibs observed that we are attended?" asked our guide. This was on the afternoon of the third day following the visit of the stranger to our tent.

"What do you mean?" we asked in a breath.

"Your servant," replied Hady Kasim, "desires to call attention to the fact that we are surrounded by horsemen, who keep at a great distance, but who move as we move and who halt as we halt. The meaning thereof it is beyond your servant to explain."

I unslung my field glass and raised it to my eyes. Hady was not mistaken. As I carefully swept the horizon I could see, to right and left and behind us, horsemen, arranged in a great half circle and moving slowly forward in the direction we were going. There were not many of them, probably fifteen in all, and I estimated that the nearest of them was quite eight miles away.

"Did you just see them?" I inquired of our guide.

"For three days," he answered, "your servant has observed that there were strangers in the vicinity, but before speaking of them he waited to make sure that they accompanied us in our march."

"They have followed us all that time?"

"During all that time, Sahib, the movements of the horsemen have been regulated by our own."

The remainder of the afternoon, as may be supposed, was spent in speculating upon the character of our unsolicited escort.

Hady Kasim's countenance indicated wonder rather than alarm. Sprague's spirits rose with his curiosity; and at supper that evening he advanced a dozen theories to account for our strange position. The least extravagant of these was that the Khedive, in excess of anxiety for our welfare, had ordered a squad of cavalry to look after us.

"See here," I said in reply to this suggestion, "let us try to be sensible. It is certain the Khedive never heard of us. Reviewing the incidents of our journey, I can think of but one circumstance which could possibly explain the presence of those fellows out there on the desert. Three days ago a wandering Arab came to our tent and asked us to execute a commission for him. The next morning, according to the statement of Hady Kasim, the horsemen appeared and have followed us ever since. It is at least conjectural that there is a mysterious association between these two facts. Perhaps the Arab, as our own police say, is wanted. He was traced to our camp, and our friends yonder think he is still with us, concealed in our pockets or coffee sacks. He may be a traitor, murderer, thief or smuggler — who knows?"

"Your theory is both ingenious and plausible," cried my comrade, "though, to be sure, it does not cover all the circumstances of the case. If these riders are simply policemen in pursuit of a criminal, whom they suppose we are harboring, why did they not close in on us long ago and look for their man at close range? It is not likely they would trail along after us through three whole days unless tolerably certain they were going in the right direction. But this does not dispose of the fact that there may be some other connection between the Arab and the horsemen, and I am going to find out what it is, if I can. Come into the tent."

"What for?" I inquired.

"To see me open the package the Arab left with us and to help me examine its contents."

To this I opposed strenuous objections, but Sprague was inflexible. He pointed out that we were in the heart of a barbarous country; that we were the objects of a demonstration which might be considered threatening; that it was a duty we owed ourselves to interpret the motives and to anticipate the designs of the enemy. And I was obliged to admit that the arguments of

my comrade carried considerable weight. The situation was extraordinary. We were surrounded by a force much superior to our own, and it was of first importance to ascertain, if possible, whether the attitude of that force was friendly or hostile. In short, I yielded the point, and together we proceeded to the tent, judging it safer, in case there were eyes in the surrounding darkness, to open the bundle within the shelter of our little dwelling. I lighted a couple of candles. Hugh extracted the package from a heap of loose blankets and carefully untied the cords which bound it. Then, peeling off the outer layers of canvas and muslin, he unrolled, and spread out on the tent floor, a rug, some four feet long by two wide. We gazed at it with feelings of curiosity, which soon merged into those of disappointment and chagrin.

"Well," said Sprague, "that disposes of your theory about the Arab. This is nothing but a little present he is sending to some of his relatives. Hi! Look there! What's the matter with you, Hady Kasim?"

I looked, and saw the face of our guide thrust between the loose flaps of the tent. And such a face! The man's eyes were bulging from their sockets, there was a distinct pallor beneath the brown, tanned skin and his features were frightfully drawn. In a moment he cast aside the flaps and fell upon his face, his body half within the tent. Then, wriggling, squirming and muttering unintelligible words, he drew himself forward, inch by inch, until he was able with outstretched arm to touch the edge of the rug. With one long, quivering finger he did touch it, and instantly drew back his hand with the gesture of one bitten by a serpent.

Sprague and I seized Hady Kasim at the same moment and jerked him unceremoniously to a sitting posture. "What's wrong with you, anyhow!" growled my comrade. "Who invited you in here to have a fit? Now get out!"

"Hold on, Hugh," I remarked. "There is something in this. Now, Hady, tell us all about it."

"The carpet! The carpet!" cried the guide, his usually quiet voice rising almost to a scream.

"Yes; it is a carpet, though a small one," I said soothingly. "In our country we would call it a rug. But why should it scare you? I give you my word that it is perfectly harmless."

"Sahibs," cried Kasim, making a mighty effort to steady himself and partially succeeding, "you do not understand. It is the Carpet of Mohammed. Upon it the great Prophet himself knelt in prayer. Thrice have I made the pilgrimage to Mecca and thrice have I beheld it hanging in the sacred mosque. See! It has seven crescents. The carpet of Omar himself has but five. Sahibs, let us fly. It were better to have a lion in your tent than the Carpet of Mohammed. There will be madness in the eyes and death in the hands of those who come to find it."

There were three grave faces in the tent as the guide finished. The situation had suddenly become serious. Hugh and I knew something of the fanatical reverence the Mohammedans entertain for their sacred relics, and understood perfectly that if we were found in unlawful possession of such a priceless thing as the prayer rug of Mohammed our lives would be worthless.

Very slowly — Hady Kasim looking on with staring, glassy eyes — I rolled the Carpet of the Prophet into a compact cylinder, reinvested it in its wrappings, held it while Hugh knotted the cords, and laid it carefully on a blanket. Then, taking the guide with us, we went outside for a conference.

"Are you absolutely sure, Hady," I said, as we sat with our heads close together, "that it is the genuine Carpet of Mohammed we have in the tent there?"

"Thrice before have I seen it, and today I have both seen and touched it," he replied, "Your servant is not mistaken. There is but one Carpet of Mohammed. Besides — why the horsemen yonder?"

"But do you suppose this precious relic flew across the Red Sea from Mecca and was picked up by a strolling Arab, who, unaware of its value, left it with us to be delivered to his brother or his uncle?"

"Sahibs," said Kasim, "it is all clear in the mind of your servant, and, if you will condescend to listen, he will make it plain. Know, then, that the Carpet of Mohammed is not kept at Mecca, but is taken there only at the time of the yearly pilgrimage, that the faithful may have an opportunity to see it. At other times it is deposited, year and year about, at Cairo and at Constantinople. This year it comes to the capital of my own country and remains

in care of the Khedive, who is responsible for its return to Mecca at the time appointed. The Sahibs will recall that when we were at Berenice the pilgrims were beginning to come across the Red Sea, journeying homeward. The festival was just then ended. Not many days later the Carpet of the Prophet, in charge of an armed escort, took the same route to Cairo."

"But did not arrive there," I remarked.

"No, Sahib, it did not arrive. It was stolen."

"Doubtless by the Arab who kindly left it in our care," said Sprague.

"Who said the man was an Arab?" inquired the guide. "Certainly it was not your servant who said it. The Sahibs are mistaken. The man was a Bedouin. His speech was that of those who live to the westward, across the Nile. There are many tribes there. Some of them do not reverence the Koran, and would hold the Prophet himself for ransom if they laid hands on him. We have talked with a man belonging to one of these tribes. Those whose figures we have seen on the horizon are the others."

"Go on, Hady Kasim," I said encouragingly, as the guide paused.

"Sahibs," he continued, after an interval of reflection, "it is not possible for your servant to say where the Carpet of the Prophet was stolen, but it is probable that it was between Berenice and El Kab, for there runs the road to Cairo. No doubt it was the intention of the brigands to make a dash westward and cross the river to their own country, where the sand is illimitable and there are many hiding places. But something interfered with this plan. We may suppose that closeness of pursuit turned them southward into this desert, where no man could follow far. Here they are temporarily safe."

"Why do you say temporarily?" Jack asked.

"Because the horsemen of the Khedive will be long in coming. A force must be collected, which will take time. Then the cavalry must prepare to cross the desert, which will take more time. The thieves travel slowly and this shows they are not greatly afraid they will be overtaken. Still they are taking no chances, for they have entrusted the carpet to us."

"In other words?" I asked.

"In other words, Sahibs, whoever, on this side of the river, has the Carpet of the Prophet in his possession is in danger of his life. The pursuers may arrive sooner than the Bedouins anticipate; they may come in the night; they may strike from an unexpected quarter. When they come the feet of their horses will leave the desert like a ploughed field and their spears will be thrust in at the door of every tent. It is better for the thieves that the carpet should be in our possession."

"Ah!" drawled Hugh. "I see their little game."

"Perhaps the Excellency's eyes do not reach so far as those of his servant," said Hady Kasim deferentially. "Can the Sahib see the things of which the Bedouins are really afraid? Can he read the thought which is in their minds?"

"May be not," replied my comrade. "You had better tell us what it is."

"If the Sahibs could examine in the darkness the maps they carry in their pockets they would see that just opposite Berenice the great river of my country turns to westward in a vast curve, two hundred miles in length. It follows that the misadventure which turned the thieves of the carpet to the south also forced them to depart further and further from the river; or, rather, the Nile turned away from them, and they are now returning to it by a circuitous route. By this means they have lost many days. Information of the robbery has reached Assouan or El Kab. On the Nile news flies like the wind. By this time every fording place is guarded and there are soldiers on the deck of every ferry boat. He who tries to carry the Carpet of Mohammed across the Nile in one hand will carry his life in the other. Sahibs, it is the thought in the mind of the Bedouins that you shall carry it across, not knowing what you carry. You are foreigners and the guards of the Nile will not suspect you. And yet, if the carpet is found in your possession, you will not see your own country again."

"What's to be done?" asked Sprague, breaking into the long interval of silence which followed the last significant remark.

"Simply this," I answered. "When we move in the morning the Carpet of Mohammed will not accompany us."

"What!" cried Hady Kasim in a terrified voice. "Would the Sahibs leave the sacred relic of the Prophet lying in the desert?"

"That is precisely what we expect to do," I said calmly.

The Mussulman lifted his hands in horror; but a moment's reflection convinced him that reverence must give way to a prudent regard for his own safety, and he offered no further protest.

When we struck tent and moved on next morning a bundle, as if by oversight, was left lying on the sand. At eleven o'clock, when we halted for our noonday rest, a horseman dashed up, handed the lost package to Hady Kasim, muttered a few words and was off at a gallop.

"He said," exclaimed our guide, when he recovered his breath, "that he found this lying where we camped last night and left his way to return it. We have seen another of the thieves."

It would take long to tell of the expedients we devised in hope of separating ourselves from the Carpet of Mohammed. Plan after plan was suggested, earnestly discussed and dropped as impracticable; but finally the ingenuity of Hady Kasim contrived a scheme which, as we all agreed, offered large chances of success, though it involved the danger of carrying the carpet with us clear through to the Nile.

Eleven days after the relic of the Prophet came to us — eight of them filled with an anxiety I would not care to experience again — we reached Wady Halfa. Our eyes were blood red from searching the horizon by day and from loss of sleep at night; but the cavalry of the Khedive had not appeared. Neither were we molested as we entered the town, traversed several narrow streets and halted at the door of an inn known to our guide. The smirking landlord assured us that an apartment was at our disposal, and we at once took possession of it, directing that all our baggage should follow us to our room, where we could unpack it ourselves. When, to the last piece, it was safely heaped in the middle of the floor — the Carpet of the Prophet reposing in a provision sack thrown carelessly in the midst of the tumbled pile — we prepared to make our last move. We had arranged that I, with Hady Kasim's assistance, was to execute it, Sprague staying by our traps to act as a check upon prying eyes or inquisitive fingers.

Hastily, but carefully, we removed the traces of our desert journey, and in an hour, under the restoring influence of razors, brushes and fresh clothes, we were transformed. Then, Kasim

playing the part of guide, I started out as if to view the town. Under my arm I carried a rather bulky canvas package, really a tent flap, rolled carefully and tied with cords. If the thieves were on the watch it was my purpose to create in their minds the impression that I was on my way to deliver the consignment entrusted to our care. Hady had assured us that the vigilance of the Bedouins would not relax, and that there would be spies on the streets of Wady Halfa, but he was equally certain that when these watchers saw, as they supposed, the Carpet of Mohammed cross the river they would at once withdraw from the town and prepare to follow it, probably scattering and making the passage at various fords above and below. We hoped that this dispersion of the Bedouins, in addition to leaving us a clear field, would deprive them of opportunity for consultation and the devising of new plans.

Very leisurely Hady Kasim and I turned our steps toward the bank of the Nile. A dozen boatmen and half as many uniformed soldiers were lounging on the floating wharf. The moment we set foot on the planks we were surrounded by a noisy crowd. Smilingly and deliberately I singled out a man and indicated by a gesture that we would take his boat. As the other watermen fell back dejectedly we were approached by the officer of the guard, who addressed a few words to my companion.

"Sahib," said Kasim, "the official desires to search us before we go on the water or cross the river."

"Tell him to go ahead," I answered composedly.

The officer ran his hand carefully through the folds of Hady Kasim's long, brown robe. Satisfied with his inspection he turned in my direction and eyed me attentively from head to foot. The package under my arm attracted his notice. For five seconds he regarded it closely, and half extended his hand to take it, but immediately reconsidered the intention. The idea of an American trying to cross the river with the Carpet of Mohammed under his arm was too preposterous for belief. Stepping aside, the officer smiled, bowed and waved his hand toward our waiting boat.

Half an hour later we touched the opposite shore. Telling the boatman that we wished to inspect the village and that he should await our return, we set off, going very slowly at first, and attract-

ing an immense amount of attention from the residents and dogs of the most dilapidated street I have ever seen. As we advanced the habitations became at once more squalid and less numerous; and finally we approached a group of three houses, separated by a hundred yards from their nearest neighbors. The first appeared to be unoccupied. Opposite the second a magnificent Arab horse was tethered to a stake, and we did not need to guess that this was the steed selected to carry the Carpet of Mohammed into the heart of the Desert of Lybia.

Kasim knocked loudly at the door of this second dwelling. In a moment it opened and we were confronted by a young man, who bowed profoundly and motioned us to enter.

"It is as I said, Sahib," muttered my guide in English, as we stepped across the threshold. "A swift courier, riding in advance, has told him whom to expect. Otherwise he would ask us what we want before inviting us to be his guests."

The Bedouin, who appeared to be the only occupant the house contained, was an athletic looking fellow, of thirty or thereabouts, and I saw at a glance that he was the man we sought. A frightful scar, extending almost from nose to ear, disfigured his left cheek, and another look showed me that his left hand wanted the thumb.

"Go ahead," I remarked to Hady Kasim.

"Are we honored by standing in the presence of one who is called Aboul Daulah?" inquired my guide of the stranger.

"It is the name given me by my father," responded the Bedouin.

"Then his Excellency, the foreign Sahib who stands at my right, has in his possession a package, which was given him, in the country beyond the river, by one who called himself Aboo Ben Abbas. It was to be delivered, in this house, to one Aboul Daulah, of a scarred face and a maimed hand."

"The Excellency, I observe, has brought the package," said the young man, his burning eyes resting on the bundle under my arm.

"No," said Kasim. "It is at the hotel of the street Tassan in Wady Halfa."

"What, then, is it that the Excellency has at his side!" inquired the Bedouin, with an indifference which, if it was feigned, was remarkable.

"That is a package made up to look like the other one."

"Ah!" returned our host, with a long expiration. "The foreign Sahib is cautious. He wished to see whether there would be one here to receive the bundle placed in his hands by my brother on the further side of the Nile. He will doubtless bring it to me this evening."

"No," replied Hady Kasim. "He will not."

"Why not?" The face before us was full of astonishment, perplexity and dawning fear.

"Because" — here the guide advanced a step and lowered his voice almost to a whisper — "Because the foreign Sahib knows what is in the other package."

The Bedouin, under the force of these words, shrank back and collapsed, as though some mighty, invisible fist had struck him in the face. He glanced through the open door to the horse beyond, and I knew it was in his heart to fly. But he gathered himself together and stood his ground, waiting for us to make the next move.

"Let him have another one," I said.

"Aboul Daulah" — Hady's voice, usually obsequious, had a ring of authority in it now — "the foreign Sahib will give the other package to one of your name and face and hand who, one hour after sunset this evening, comes for it to the hotel of the street Tassan. Beyond that time he will wait while one may count five hundred slowly. Then he will ascend to the housetop and throw the bundle into the street, for him to have who finds it." With that we left softly, closing the door as we went out.

Exactly fifty-two minutes after sundown that evening a servant came to our room with information that a man who knew us at Delligo wished to see us.

"Nonsense," cried Sprague. "We were never at Delligo in our lives."

Fortunately, the servant did not understand English. I caught Hady Kasim's eye fixed upon me, and nodded affirmatively.

"Bring him in," said our guide.

The man who entered was dressed in the costume of a Nile sailor; but a look at his face left no doubt of his identity. We received him with a cordiality which was perhaps a little overdone,

and ordered coffee served in our room. For twenty minutes our apartment was the scene of animated talk and reminiscent laughter, for there were many people about the place, and the walls were thin. As our guest rose to depart I indicated to him a package lying on the floor, and, under cover of a salaam, he seized it and swept it into a fold of his robe. We accompanied him to the outer door of the hotel and followed him into the darkness with wishes that we might see him again — Hady Kasim interpreting vociferously. Early the next morning we embarked on a down-river boat for Cairo.

I have never heard how the Carpet of Mohammed fared after leaving our possession, or by what means the Khedive recovered it, but a friend who, in the disguise of a Mussulman, visited Mecca the following year, at the time of the great pilgrimage, told me afterward that the prayer rug of the Prophet was hanging in its place on the wall of the sacred mosque.

The Double Wedding at Section Thirty.*

BY H. A. CRAFTS.

ANS WOLFRAM and Gus Liebenhocker had concluded to move West. They thought that South Dakota would about suit them. Hans, however, left his family behind him and went to spy out the land. Hans and Gus were brothers-in-law. Hans had married Gus's sister, Freda Liebenhocker. Gus was also married, but that was to Katrina Dreer, a distant relative of the Wolframs. Hans and Freda had three children and Gus and Katrina two. The families had always lived upon the best of terms, and they had mutually agreed to settle on adjoining lands in the West, and be close neighbors.

Hans spent six months looking round. Then he sent for Freda and the children and the Liebenhockers; and they all travelled West together. The family reunion was a happy one. Hans, however, had not yet selected a location. The two brothers-in-law spent some time in driving out into the country. They had decided not to buy lands, but to take up a quarter section each under the Homestead Act. There was any amount of land open for settlement, and it was excellent land, too. But the two men were slow to decide upon an exact location, as they wanted to make just the right selection, so long as it was a question of a permanent residence in the West.

They were troubled, too, with another scruple. There was so much land open for entry that they regretted exceedingly that Uncle Sam allowed each settler no more than one hundred and sixty acres. But they could not be blamed so much, for the very best of them become land-greedy as soon as they get out West.

Hans was very thoughtful, and had such frequent spells of mental abstraction that Freda and Gus were puzzled, not to say worried. They could not imagine what was weighing upon his mind. One day while the two men were out prospecting Hans broke a silence that had lasted for some time.

"Yust vait a bit! Let me t'ink a leedle!" said he.

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Gus was even more puzzled than before; for he had never shown any inclination to hurry Hans nor to proscribe his mental exercise. But he did not seek for an explanation of Hans's somewhat mysterious exclamation.

The next day Hans consulted a lawyer and discovered that a woman who was of age and the head of a family could take up government land under the Homestead Act. A widow or a divorced woman would come within the purview of the law. He had no idea of making widows out of Freda and Katrina, but still thought that there was a way out.

When Hans unfolded his plan to Freda and the Liebenhockers, the women did not know whether to laugh or cry. Gus, however, was elated. He gave his right thigh a sounding slap.

"Py chimminy!" he cried, "vat a beek het!" and in sheer sportiveness he began to feel of Hans's bumps.

"But der groundts?" he said, looking a little more sober and thoughtful. "How vos dot?"

"Groundts! Groundts!" cried the optimistic Hans, in tones of contempt. "Blenty! Blenty, undt to sbare!"

"Yaw! uv goarse!" returned Gus, with a touch of sarcasm. "But der sbecificationses! How vos dot? Schpit 'em oudt!"

"Dot vos all righdt!" said Hans. "For Freda, some tesertions; for Katrina some delopements!"

It was true that Hans had gone West and left Freda for six months, and just as true that Gus had gone West in company with Hans's wife. But that was only half of the truth; but a half truth, stoutly maintained, may be more potent than a whole one.

Of course, when Freda and Katrina swore to this state of facts in the South Dakota divorce court, it was with some mental reservation. But all courts do not trouble themselves about the mental reservation of litigants, and the consequence was that the suits of Wolfram *vs.* Wolfram and Liebenhocker *vs.* Liebenhocker went through the legal mill without a hitch. The plantiffs were granted absolute divorces with custody of their children, twenty-five dollars per month alimony, and the privilege of reassuming their maiden names.

Just previous to the filing of these suits Hans Wolfram and Gus Liebenhocker quietly withdrew from the scene. Leaving their

spouses in town to prosecute their respective libels, they went out into the country about ten miles and located each a homestead. It is not germane to this chronicle to specify the exact township and range in which the land lay. It will be sufficient to state that it lay in Section Thirty. Hans filed on the northeast quarter and Gus on the southeast quarter.

This done, they employed the services of a civil engineer to run out their boundaries, and also to locate to a nicety the very centre of Section Thirty. At this central point they jointly erected a frame building, twenty-four by twenty-eight feet on the ground, having the centre of the structure coincide exactly with the centre of Section Thirty. Then they subdivided the building into four rooms of exact size, by erecting transverse partitions. There was no door connecting any two of the four rooms. This gave a room twelve by fourteen feet to each of the four quarters of Section Thirty, and covered the law precisely as to the erection of claim dwellings. Hans Wolfram took up his abode in the northeast room and Gus Liebenhocker in the southeast room.

It was not many days after the conclusion of the cases of Wolfram *vs.* Wolfram and Liebenhocker *vs.* Liebenhocker that one Mistress Freda Liebenhocker filed a homestead on the northwest quarter of Section Thirty, and one Mistress Katrina Dreer one on the southwest quarter, and these two excellent women moved out from town with their children and other belongings and took up their residences upon their respective claims as the law required. Mistress Liebenhocker and her three little ones occupied the northwest room in the quadruple house and Mistress Dreer and her two little ones the southwest room. They lived as good neighbors with each other, and with Hans Wolfram and Gus Liebenhocker. The two latter were thus given a good opportunity to see their children daily. Mistress Liebenhocker employed Hans Wolfram to fence and improve her claim, while Mistress Dreer followed a like course with reference to her late husband, and each employé at the end of each month was given credit for his wages on the alimony due from them to the two women.

In proving up on their respective claims Hans Wolfram and Gus Liebenhocker deferred making proof until such time as Mistress Liebenhocker and Mistress Dreer were entitled to prove up

on theirs, at which time all four became competent witnesses for each other in testifying to the "continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land" for a legal period of time.

So all four claimants and the children went to town on proof day, and had the business done up in due and legal form. It made it very convenient indeed for all, and saved a large amount in witness fees. Not long afterwards quit-claim deeds by which Freda Liebenhocker conveyed the northwest quarter of Section Thirty to Hans Wolfram, and by which Katrina Dreer conveyed the southwest quarter to Gus Liebenhocker, with all their rights, titles and interests, appeared on record at the county seat.

But the crowning act of this little Western by-play did not occur until the double wedding shortly afterwards was held at Section Thirty, when Hans Wolfram and Freda Liebenhocker and Gus Liebenhocker and Katrina Dreer were reunited in the holy bonds of matrimony. On this happy occasion the neighbors for miles around assembled in response to invitations and a grand feast and jollification was indulged in.

Then a doorway was opened between the northwest and the northeast rooms, and another between the southwest and the southeast, after which the quadruple house was transformed into a double house, the Wolfram family occupying the north half and the Liebenhocker the south half. This arrangement lasted until the two families outgrew their respective apartments, when Gus Liebenhocker presented his share in the building to Hans Wolfram in consideration of Hans's superior wisdom and kindly offices. Hans moved the house over on to the north half of Section Thirty and cut two more doorways, making of it a single tenement. Then Gus built himself a new house on the south half of the Section, which is a duplicate of Hans's house, and stands as further testimony to the perspicacity of the worthy head of the Wolfram family, which was instrumental in providing each of the two settlers with a good farm of three hundred and twenty acres instead of one of only half that size.

The Thousandth Chance.*

BY RICHARD BARKER SHELTON.

OUNG Dr. Fleming stood six-feet-two in his stocking feet. In college he had been accounted one of the best athletes the university had ever had. He left a record for the "two-twenty" and shot-put which stands to-day, and every fall after his graduation he received letters from the head coach of the eleven begging him to drop practice for a week or so "and come down to get the tackles into some kind of shape." From which it may be readily inferred that Fleming was not the man to be easily stirred, especially by anonymous letters.

It was on a mild October day that the doctor received the first one. It was addressed in a scrawling hand, evidently disguised.

Do not go to 126 Kilton Street on any consideration. This is the advice of a sincere well-wisher.

Fleming tossed it into the waste basket and in two minutes had forgotten its existence. A day or so later another met with a similar fate, but, when the third arrived, the young physician was plainly annoyed.

"Now what the devil—" he began impatiently, and then read again the note, which was written in the same scrawling hand.

Under no consideration go to 126 Kilton Street. Your practice is not all you have imagined it would be—

"Hang it," growled the doctor, "that's true enough!"

—nevertheless, there are things which money cannot compensate. The person interested in your welfare who sends you these notes forces them upon you because he fears that one or two you might think merely a joke. Permit him to say it is nothing of the kind, but a very serious matter, and, moreover, it is highly imperative, for your present and future welfare, to give the above number a wide berth.

The note was signed: "One who takes interest enough in you to warn you."

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The doctor was thoroughly exasperated.

"Interest be damned," he growled. "Whoever you are, you're a consummate coward. Why don't you come out like a man? The more fool you to think I'll pay attention to your impertinent scrawls. I don't even know where your street is, and what's more, I don't care a rap." With which he tossed the note into the waste basket — and ten minutes later was looking up Kilton Street in the directory.

He found it led off one of the main thoroughfares down by the wharves. A rather unsavory locality, he reflected, and one to which he was in no wise likely to be summoned. Why, then, should his "well-wisher" warn him against it? If this was some joke of the boys, they were doomed to disappointment. He would treat the whole matter with indifference. Nay, more, he would utterly ignore it. Who said he had ever received anonymous notes? Who? He glared about him in the gathering dusk of his office and then fell to laughing to find himself so much exercised about the affair.

A week went past. Then one morning a letter in the familiar hand appeared. At first Fleming was inclined to throw it into the fire unopened. Curiosity, however, prevailed, and he broke the seal. The letter ran:

> Let me warn you again about 126 Kilton Street. You may or may not have been summoned there. You may possibly be unaware of its existence. At any rate, do not go there. These notes, be assured, are for your own good, as is the advice they humbly offer.
>
> YOUR WELL-WISHER.

"Now, hang his cowardly carcass," the doctor thundered. "If I only knew where to lay hands on this valiant 'well-wisher' — " he smote his desk a blow that made it creak. "This thing," he said, when he had cooled down somewhat, "has gone quite far enough. Hereafter any letters of this type are burned at the outset. Whoever this sneaking parcel of impertinence is, he'll do well to save his time and ink."

Yet every letter that came Fleming opened and read, and afterwards confessed himself a weak fool.

It happened that one afternoon a professional call took him down to the vicinity of the water-front, and, as he came away, it occurred to him to go out of his way a block or so, and have a

look at 126 Kilton Street. He found it easily enough — an old brick house, with swell front running up the entire three stories, and its general aspect of degeneration heightened by an additional story recently built on and covered with zinc.

"So that's the enemy," he said, as he stood on the opposite curb. "Seedy old hole enough — probably a sailors' lodging-house or a sweat-shop. Doesn't look unusually dangerous. By Jove, I've half a mind to go over and ring the bell."

He debated the idea a moment, then turned on his heel and went up town. It was not physical fear but a horror of being ridiculous that kept him from solving the riddle then and there. As it was, he was completely disgusted by the intensity of his own curiosity which the letters had aroused.

Next morning, the boy who was cleaning up his office was favored with some pretty stiff language. Fleming stood reading the following:

> It is highly essential that the matter referred to in many previous letters be again brought to your attention. It is evident that you have received some communication from 126 Kilton Street. Yesterday you went to the address mentioned and for a time it seemed quite possible that you would enter. Your better judgment prevailed, however, and you went away without making so grave an error. Again be warned against entering that house. Do not show yourself in the vicinity even. It is dangerous for you to do so. The person who sends you this knows whereof he writes.

"See here," the doctor yelled, flourishing the letter in the face of the startled boy, "is there any part of this city I'm afraid to enter? No," he bellowed, in answer to his own question, "and what's more, I'll go where and when I like."

He seized his hat and stick and slammed out of the office, leaving the astonished youngster trembling in the farthest corner. Five minutes later he was back for his coat. The November chill had cooled his wrath somewhat, but it flared forth again as he opened a telegram handed him by a waiting messenger:

"Do not go to 126. Remember."

"That settles it," he said, with determination, and, donning his coat, he hurried down the street and boarded the first ferry car.

When Fleming alighted, he went direct to Kilton Street. Without a moment's hesitation he mounted the steps of 126 and pulled the bell. In the few seconds he stood there waiting, he began to wonder what he should offer as an excuse for his visit. He had

received no communication from the occupants of the house. For the fraction of a minute he saw possibilities of an awkward situation. These were dispelled when a well-groomed man with gray hair and beard opened the door and bowed low.

"Dr. Fleming, I believe," he said. "Won't you step in?"

The door closed behind them and Fleming found himself in a large, bare hall, dimly lighted from the transom above his head. He stood glaring about him in the gloom, while the other man fumbled for the knob of the front-room door.

"Well?" said the doctor, and his inflection made it a word of various meanings.

The gray-haired man had found the knob and opened the door. "Will you kindly step this way?" said he, and he ushered Fleming into a cozily-furnished room. A fire glowed in the grate and tiers of books lined the walls.

"Well?" said Fleming again, with the same inflection, when he was seated.

His host stood before the fire, his hands behind his back and his cynical gray eyes scrutinizing the doctor's face.

"Dr. Fleming," he said at length, "you have been somewhat annoyed of late by the receipt of anonymous letters. I owe you every apology for sending them."

"You?" said the doctor, incredulously.

"Yes, it was I. Grant me a moment and I'll explain. I am not the sort of man who accepts people on trust. To me a man is a coward or a cad until he has proven himself a man of nerve or a gentleman. It is the most logical basis to start from — it avoids complications. So much by way of preface. Now, to real business. But first, Dr. Fleming, let me offer you a cigar."

Fleming thanked him and lighted the weed.

"You have heard, perhaps, that a few years since, a party of prospectors ran across a wonderful zinc lode down in Patagonia. No? Well, such was the case. A company was formed, engineers and men were sent down and to-day Columbia-Patagonian stock is way above par. It is my good fortune to serve the company as managing director.

"There's quite a little settlement at the mines — eighty odd souls besides the breeds — and despite the fact that it is a fearfully

out-of-the-way hole, the boys seem to get their share of fun out of it. This is the best side of it. There's another side — the Indians and breeds. Every little while they wax playful, and if we don't lose a man or so, we consider ourselves in luck. Now, what with the Indians and the constant liability of accidents in the mines, a man's life isn't exactly safe, but to make it as far so as possible, we have decided to send a resident surgeon down there. Our employés, Dr. Fleming, are all tried men. We know what to expect of them. Consequently, when the question of the choice of a surgeon arose it behooved us to know our man. It is one of those places where a poor surgeon with nerve is more desirable than a good one lacking that quality.

"I went to a friend of mine, who is a professor in the very medical school from which you hold a diploma, laid the case before him and requested the names of some young physicians who (pardon frankness) were not succeeding tremendously. Three names were given me, and to each I wrote anonymous letters from this address, which is our temporary disbursing office. It was my intention, after sending the telegrams to-day, to send a carriage to the office of each, summoning him to this address. I estimated the chances one to a thousand that any one of them would take the initiative and sift the matter for himself, as you have done. I confess I am pleased with your action. I have stated the whole matter frankly. I will be as frank in adding that the sum our surgeon will receive for his services will not be niggardly. If you care to think of it I shall be glad to consider you an applicant for the position."

Fleming thought of his struggling practice, of bills long overdue, and, finally, of a certain wedding of the previous June.

"I'll be very glad if you will," he said, simply.

Just then three hacks drew up before the door.

"Ah," said his host, "here are the vehicles which were to seek our victims. Two, I think, we shall no longer need. If you'll join me in the other, we'll drive up town and discuss it further over lunch."

Rance.*

BY BLAND BRUNNER HUDDLESTON.

ANCE was a little negro who lived in a Mississippi railroad town, close up to the "Orphants' Home," where his mother was a cook. When he appeared in any fresh new-old garment we knew that the "orphants" had been made glad by the receipt of a "box"; for Rance's mother clothed him in the orphans' cast-offs. All except shoes — it took *new* shoes to hold Rance.

Rance was a ginger-cake negro, meaning a nice brown. He did not know how old he was. No more do I; but he was not taller than my own dear nine-year-old, though more muscular and stout. His face was covered with jet-black dots and dashes, like Morse-code characters. I thought at first that they were ink spatters. They proved to be small-pox scars.

Rance's only vanity was his hair, which had never been cut. He was the only boy negro-child I have ever known to wear his hair plaited in little tails or, when his "mammy" had not time to braid it, done up in the string-wrapped wisps affected by Southern "people of color" as a week-day coiffure.

Rance's young mistress offered to buy his hair — duly delivered — for she resented this feature. But Rance only grinned and shook his head or, if she seemed vexed about it, dropped his shrewd little bullet-like eyes and looked sorrowful. For he liked to oblige people; his plaits were the only thing he ever refused anybody.

Rance was by profession a coachman. At least his business in life was to harness up the fat old pony of his younger mistress (he had two mistresses), who was a stenographer in the city, and drive her to and from her office. So he *felt like* a coachman and, while officiating as such, sitting up straight and dignified in the low

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $125 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending February 26, 1902.

phaeton, jerking manfully on the lines, he would no more have acknowledged kinship or acquaintance with other urchins whom he passed on the street than would the snobbiest grown driver in the town. Off duty, however, he laid his official dignity aside and played or ran errands in a very uncoachmanlike manner. Numerous chores fell to his lot. If he had not seemed so happy one must have pitied him. He must often have been very, very tired at night, and sometimes the cold pinched him sadly, but he did not complain. Contentment is preëminently a negro characteristic.

Rance's mother was poor, but she was a kind mother. Rance was always glad to go to his poor home when night came or the idle Sunday. Sometimes when it rained hard or was very cold (the cold of the South is astonishingly raw and penetrating) Rance's young Miss Vallie would make him a pallet before her fire, piling him high with old quilts, and he did not go home. He enjoyed that. From my rooms above stairs I could hear him romping noisily, while the ladies laughed and egged him on — Miss Vallie because she was fond of him just as other pretty women are fond of their pet dogs; her mother because it reminded her of other days, when she had owned a score of little blacks like Rance.

Rance, however, had his tribulations, and while they lasted he did not care for even his plaits. For Mrs. Crandall, Miss Vallie's mother and Rance's other mistress, had an uncertain temper. She was "good" by rare spells; always she was an inveterate nagger; ofttimes she was violently angry about very little, and, for a lady, she had a wonderful command of vituperative language. People liked to get out of the way when Mrs. Crandall thirsted for combat. Rance could not always do this; but patience was one of his virtues and his mother had taught him never to "sass back." Sometimes Miss Vallie secretly made things up to him by slipping him an apple. He doted on apples!

Not very rich herself, Mrs. Crandall yet resented the very existence of the poor or improvident, except they cringed to her. A driver of slaves in slave-time, she was, of course, a hater of free blacks. Negro she spelled with two g's and was only deterred by the rules of orthography from putting in four of those disparaging consonants. Mrs. Crandall gave Rance plenty of food — she resented the presence of lean animals on her place, be they boys or

mules — but she dumped it down to him much as she gave her dog his portion. If she did sometimes set Rance tasks beyond his strength she justified herself by saying, "Rance hired to me in response to the ad, 'Wanted: young negro to drive and do chores. Wages moderate.' If he doesn't like his job he can quit."

When Rance's month was about up, and he could leave without losing his wages, Mrs. Crandall always grew very kind to him for a few days, and a negro is gullible above anything. So Rance stayed on.

Though a boarder, I was obliged to be in the kitchen a good deal; my eleven-year-old, Edward, had been very ill and I had his special diet to prepare. Being a woman of sympathy and perhaps overgiven to "speak out in meeting" when I see a weaker oppressed, it occasionally happened that by seeking to intercede for him I came in for a liberal share of Mrs. Crandall's abusive language and so diverted her attack from Rance to myself. Then his dumb, dog-like gratitude was a full reward.

One cold, cold day when it seemed as if we all should freeze — as the orange-trees, figs and oleanders had done outside — I found Rance shivering in the niche behind the stove, where he always crouched when in disfavor. The fire was low and gusts of wind came in through the thin walls, but I stirred up the coals, opened the door of the hot oven and told Rance to sit up and toast his feet in it. "Almost anything is better than to have a frozen negro around," I thought. From that hour Rance was my slave and right nobly did he prove it.

It was about this time that Rance stole a pig's head for me and I awoke to the fact that his devotion was a state of things having distinct drawbacks. My Edward, after months of illness from malarial poisoning, had just reached that stage of convalescence when nothing in existence is counted of use except it be *good to eat*. What he did not "study up" to want has been left out of the dictionaries. He recalled to mind a blissful visit to the country during that yearly "event" on Southern farms, hog-killing time, and high in his memory loomed up a dish of "brains an' eggs" which had figured prominently among the special delicacies of the festive season. This he clamored for with all a sick child's querulous persistence, and finally the doctor said, "Fix him some,"

laying down his law governing the amount and cookery of it.

It was then that I learned what an elusive thing brains are — considered commercially. They simply did not exist in the local market; some buyer — a restaurant, perhaps — must, that year, have had a "corner" in brains. In vain I sought, by offering the invalid every other portion of pork anatomy, to tempt him into forgetfulness. I even dwelt eloquently upon the reputed toothsomeness of *tails*, but it was useless.

One day I said to Rance, "If any of your people have a pig to kill, please buy the brains for me." I had just thought of that — of how some of the negroes owned their homes, and how almost the first thing one of them does after moving into his own property is to build a rickety pen close to the house and put a pig (generally a runt, because runts are cheaper) to house-keeping in it. It is his patent of gentility — the outward symbol of proprietorship.

Rance looked puzzled. "Des' de breens?" he asked, adding hopefully, "Mebbe so, I kin git ye a laig, or a whole ha'slet. Mis' Toler, her what is Miss Vallie's washlady, her's got a whole raft 'er pigs in her pen. I seed 'er grin'in' sossige no longer dan yist'day."

"Oh, I don't want legs and livers," I exclaimed. "Master Edward remembers a dish he liked so much at Colonel Durin's last winter, and I am trying to get it for him now. Dr. Brooke says he may have some. I'll pay well for the brains; it will be worth something to get peace in the family."

Next day but one Rance brought me a hog-head — an immense one, with all its contents intact. Evidently here at last were brains in plenty. The question was, how to get at them, for I had only a dull hatchet and a case knife to work with. Mrs. Crandall resented my "messing around" and kept her other kitchen tools locked up. Before I got through I understood just why an obstinate man is so aptly called "pig-headed."

"Rance," I inquired, dubiously, "is not this very big? Wouldn't they split it for you? *I* don't want all this meat." Rance studied his shoes, just as he did when Mrs. Crandall was on a rampage.

"Oh, no matter," I said. "What was the price?"

"Dey ain't say," Rance answered, slowly. "I 'spec de gemman des' low ter gib it to ye."

I had lived in the country, where neighborly exchanges of this sort between white and colored people are not uncommon. Supposing the head to be a gift from "Miss Vallie's washlady," I mentally resolved to make her a suitable present besides paying for the head.

Rance continued, "I could a-fotch some sossige, only I reckin Mas' Ed couldn't a-et 'em."

"Yes?" I said, absently, for a hatchet is an engrossing thing at times.

"And all pork is a 'bit' a pound, isn't it?"

I always will believe Rance was perfectly honest except for this one lapse. I could always trust him with money.

"Pay for it out of this dollar," I said, "and keep a dime for yourself."

Rance laid the money on the table, handling it as though it were hot or heavy.

"I spec' he don' want no money," he said, and went out.

The very next day Rance was arrested for robbing a meat shop! A pretty predicament this for me — the mother of a family, and receiving stolen goods! Mrs. Crandall was in a dreadful rage — with Rance for his enforced absence; with me for my unintentional complicity in his crime.

All that day I shunned the lower rooms where I might meet her. I ate crackers and cooked my sick boy's food over the lamp, rather than go downstairs, all the while "working my mind" prodigiously; for murmurs from below told me that Mrs. Crandall was doing the "solitary conversational" with vehemence and I even feared she might do Rance bodily injury if he should return before her anger abated.

It took me three days to get Rance out of the lock-up! For one thing, we were both new to the business; then, too, Rance would tell such stories, trying to shield me. He was certainly a bright negro, and it was plain to him how I shrank from publicity in the matter. Well, I *didn't* want it to get into the papers. He affirmed, under solemn oath, that "de lady 'uzn't figgerin' in dis yere stu'bance. I clar to goo'ness I des' tuk an' tuk dat haid pupposely fo' myse'f," he vowed, ignoring the fine pantomime I was executing behind the questioning officer's broad back.

"Why, Rance, you know—" I began, for visions of the chain gang rose in my mind.

"Deed I *did*, too. I des' nachelly been a-burnin' to see de enside er one dis long time."

It was only by sacrificing my whole month's pin money that the irate meat-vender was persuaded to withdraw his charge and Rance came free. Mrs. Crandall was glad to get him back, but she deemed some punishment necessary. The next week his brother died and she refused to allow Rance his "time" to attend the funeral, though everybody knows that to negroes death itself is a small affair compared with a "fun'al." Rance's mother promised him a "lots bigger un, next un dat died in de fambly," and this comforted him.

About this time Dr. Brooke decided that Edward needed a change, and we went to an interior village to live—a place many miles from the railroad. Our departure grieved poor Rance, but we parted from him while a great joy was upon him—Mrs. Crandall, realizing the approach of another month's end, had bought Rance a pair of boots as a hire, to hold him on, perhaps. Or she may have repented of her harshness concerning the funeral. Anyway, Rance got the boots and when we left he was engaged in trying, whenever Miss Vallie was not by, to drive with his feet stuck on top of the dashboard of the buggy, where he could gaze at them.

. . . . . .

Another soft Southern spring had slipped by and summer was upon us, hot and sultry. We had spent a year in our new home on the banks of the Pearl, and Edward had rowed, fished and hunted himself back into robust health. We had almost forgotten Rance. Then, one July morning when I stepped from my room upon the wide, vine-clad eastern gallery which was our summer living-room, I stumbled over a boy. He had crouched upon a rug there in such fashion that when the door was opened he fell back across the threshold of my uncarpeted room with that peculiar dull thud made only by the falling of a limp, insensible human body. The jar did not arouse him and he looked so wan and ill that I called loudly for help. Rosa, the old black cook, ran up from the kitchen, her hands shedding little driblets of dough at every step.

She eyed Rance — for despite his growth and wanness I knew him instantly — with indignant disgust, and no great wonder that she did; for he was ragged, footsore and dusty. The "orphants" seemed to have deserted him altogether. Rosa had been raised a petted slave. As a child her mistress had fancied her — for her ape-like ugliness, perhaps — and had trained her into a model servant. Rosa slept at her mistress's feet, in the same bed, until she was grown. She prided herself on her superior advantages and was a stickler for "manners" in either race.

"Humph!" she snorted, prancing around Rance as if she longed to shake him. "Hit 'pears lak we-all got quare comp'ny dis mawnin'. Wha' dat tramp hail hisse'f fum? — come a-quilin' hissef up on w'ite folks' do'sills, same as a cat. Niggers dese days ain' got no 'spect fer deyse'ves, gwine roun' beggin' dey victuals, stidder wukkin' fo' dey braid. I lay my ol' Miss would fix dat tramp ef she was livin'!"

Rosa despised idlers.

"It's a poor boy we used to know," I said. "He is no tramp."

"Well, dat's diffunt," and Rosa, relenting slightly, stooped to inspect Rance more closely. Noting his scarred face she jumped back.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, mistis," she cried, throwing up her floury hands, "what *do* ail dat chile?"

I laughed. I simply could not help it, though to do so distressed Rosa, who continued:

"Roll dat nigger out er here quick — I dasen't tech him! Roll 'im out an' sen' fo' de crowner fo' to set on 'im an' see what make he all spotted lak dis. Hit mought be leppusy!"

"I was afraid he might be dead," I said. "He isn't. Let him sleep here," and I slipped a cushion under his head.

All that day Rance slept there among the vines and caladiums, nothing disturbed by all our usual noise and bustle. Rosa went about her work muttering savagely; but I knew her to be one of those people of whom it is said, "His bark is worse than his bite," and it did not surprise me to see her slip in and sponge off Rance's face and bathe his sore feet. When she rose up from this task I scarcely knew her for the anguished pity in her face. But I said no word.

"I gwine wake dat boy up fo' I leave here," Rosa said at sundown. "Dey shan't no nigger lay up in de shade an' sleep hisse'f to death where I wuks."

By that I knew Rosa had Rance a good supper laid by. She was as good as her word and before he realized what was happening she had dragged him into the kitchen, where she plied him with food and questions in about equal proportions. Later, she came out and sat on the doorstep looking sad and disturbed.

"Hit make me think of slavery and the paterollers to year dat po' chile talk," she said. "I mos' furgit dey wuz a Bad Place sence I been a widder an' livin' wid you-all. But dat chile has sho' been wukkin' fo' de Ol' Boy's wife."

Rosa got up suddenly and went home for the night. Before she slept she tucked or otherwise "took in" a suit of clothes which had belonged to her undeplored "fus' husban'" and next morning she hustled Rance off to the spring-branch to "fresh hisse'f fum his jo'ney" before coming to greet the family.

This sensible advice Rance followed and came back grinning broadly.

Already the toilsome journey and the trials which preceded it were things of the past with Rance.

"Thought you'd pay us a visit, did you?" I asked, as Rance backed up against a post of the gallery, cast a smile of sheepish good-fellowship at the children and gave an approving glance around the premises. A negro always likes best those whites who have nice things about them.

Rance proceeded to study his toes, now bare and the worse for recent hard usage. It had been a matter of pride with Rance's mother that he had never gone barefoot, so his feet were tender.

"Tain't des' a visit," he answered, slowly but firmly. "I gwine stay, mebbe so, if you'll le' me."

"You missed us, then?"

"You bet I did! Ain't you-all miss me?"

His faith was so appealing that I had to nod, which set his face to beaming.

"I miss you an' dem chillen so bad at de fust off-start dat I say to mammy ev'y mawnin' dat if 'twuzn't fer leavin' *her* I'd foller ye, if 'twuz to de jumpin-off place."

"Yes, Lawd!" sanctioned Rosa, who hovered about on some pretext connected with the breakfast table.

"And desert Miss Vallie?"

Rance squirmed. He wanted to be loyal to Miss Vallie. Rosa gave an indignant snort, when Rance cut in again:

"Miss Vallie aint lak her ma," and he flashed a defiant look at Rosa which sent her muttering to her work. "Miss Vallie wuz all right. But her up an' got ma'ed torrec'ly atter you-all lef.' Den I say I wuz sho' gwine quit dat place, come w'at would, go w'at must; I des' couldn' endyore it no longer. But ev'y time I sesso Miss Vallie's ma, her'd up an' draw dem boots on me."

"*Do what?*" I asked.

"Drawed dem boots — you seed 'em — what her gived me. Her say I owes her fer de boots, w'en all dis time I been 'lowin' dey wuz a presen'."

"They were!"

"No, dey wuzn't. Leastways I been wukkin' 'em out mos' a year now. Ev'y time I draw my pay her'd dock me so much fer de boots, an' it come to dat pass dat I ain' know skercely which eend er me 'uz up, haid or footses — I study 'bout boots so much. I ain't even sho' if my name is Rance or not, I'ze so trouble in de mind. Miss Vallie aint mo'n gone f'um dar, 'fo' her ma 'gun to pin down on me like I'ze rank pizen. I cain't please her *noway*, and yit I cain't leave her."

This queer state of things is easily explained. There is a law in the South, as perhaps elsewhere, which requires a servant to pay up any debt he may have incurred with one employer before engaging to another, or the employer of a delinquent servant may be sued for heavy damages. It is a just law, but one which unscrupulous people may pervert to selfish ends. I have seen many negroes who were practically enslaved by this means.

"Rance," I asked, "why did your mother not get a lawyer to arrange your account with Mrs. Crandall? She could have been made to swear to an itemized statement."

"Mammy died."

"Oh," was all I could say.

"Her had de scyarlet fever, what her ketched f'um de orphants."

"Oh," I said again.

"De p'lice 'ouldn' let us have no fun'al, neider. Us oughter have a *big* fun'al fo' mammy; her'd been savin' money fo' de nex' fun'al in de fambly ever sence Bud was berrid 'dout me seein' it."

Rance's tones indicated a resentful grief, but he quickly rallied, adding whimsically, "Atter dat I des up an' tuk my foot in my han' an' *runned* away. But it 'uz a lot furrer ways dan what I thought," he added reflectively.

"Well," I said briskly, "trot along and make yourself useful to Aunt Rosa. You will get no new boots here." And "trot" he did, literally. Rosa began to complain that he left her nothing to do. In return she did her best to fill out the hollows in his cheeks and "git some meat on dem pipestems in his britches laigs." She took of her own wages to buy clothes for him and, being an expert needlewoman, she soon had him neatly clad. His manners she cultivated diligently, telling him so much of what was "proper in de days of Ol' Miss" that Rance began to regard that worthy woman as a second edition of Sarah Gamp's Mrs. Harris — only he had not that literary groundwork upon which to found his suspicions. For Rance never learned to read. He could write, in print, "Look out for the locomotive," because that warning sign stood near his home; there his education stopped. Mrs. Crandall, suspecting Rance's refuge, wrote me a warlike letter, but I got a lawyer friend to answer it and that ended the matter. She troubled Rance no more.

For two months Rance lived in paradise. He and Rosa had one royal battle, after which he never more questioned her authority or *wore his hair in plaits* — she cut it too close for even kinks to come in it! It improved his looks, too.

At last, school-time drawing near, we prepared to return to the city, taking with us both Rosa and Rance. Soon we were snugly settled in a cottage — one not at all near to Mrs. Crandall's abode. Then, late in September, when all danger of it seemed past, came the yellow fever — dread spectre of Southern cities. Before we could rally our dazed faculties sufficiently to plan for flight the surrounding country had thrown up the iron barricade of a relentless quarantine and we were shut in. No one who has not tried it can imagine one tithe of the isolation of a quarantined town. The mere inconvenience is bad enough, for all social and business life is

paralyzed. There are no mails, no trains, no public meetings, no visits — no anything but the telephone. Foodstuffs grow scarce; every little ill strikes terror in your breast and you imagine the presence of various unfailing symptoms of the dreaded malady. Always there is the harrowing fear for loved ones within the lines — often as great anxiety for one without to whom one is not, upon any necessity of life or death, permitted to pass. The mental strain is terrible.

Rosa was in a panic from the start, and in spite of my protests went about with a bag of asafœtida as large as a hen's egg tied round her neck. This gave our house the odor of a chemist's laboratory on "off" days and was far from pleasant.

She would scarcely allow us to get in provisions, lest we get in germs, also. But Rosa served a good purpose — she was useful to laugh at. Laughter was good for us — when we *could* laugh! However, all our precautions were futile; the fever seemed, that year, to ride upon the winds. There came a day when, within the space of six hours, five members of the family were stricken and I alone was spared to nurse them. The desolation of those first few hours haunts my dreams yet.

It was too much for Rosa; she bolted.

"I sutten'y does hate to 'sert you in yo' distremity," she said, calling me to the back steps where she stood ready bonneted for flight. "But I sho' is gwine back wha' I came from."

I was too depressed by the situation to attempt to dissuade her.

"You can't get out," was all I said. "Why, the guards would shoot you like a rabbit."

Rosa waxed valiant. "Dey 'on't shoot *me!* I'ze gwine out er dis yere town ef I hatter kill ev'y sojer-man in Miss'ippi. I ain't want no stu'bance wid 'em; but I sho' will pass 'em— dem or *wha' dey been*, one er turrer."

I never heard of any slain soldiers, but Rosa certainly had "blood in her eye," and she did not come back.

When I returned to the sick-room I found Rance there — a forlorn figure, for the sight of suffering always made him quail.

"Go out," I cried. "I need help sorely, but I would not have you stay and die." Rance sat down by the baby's crib. His manner was resolute — almost defiant.

"I 'on't stay out, eider, w'en a whole passel er my frien's is des a-perishin' fer nussin'. Why, hit's a plumb *hosspittle!* I kin min' de baby w'ile you ten's ter de balance."

What he said was true, and I needed help — and company — oh, so sorely. So he stayed.

He was patient, obedient and tireless; though inexperienced, he showed a latent deftness in the sick-room. I do not see how we could have spared his services, for a sudden increase of patients made it impossible for us to obtain more than one trained nurse. Rance assisted the trained nurse; when she slept I and a raw immune did our united best.

Rance was of incalculable use, indoors and out, in the anxious days which now followed; days when only the doctor could leave the house, and only the overtaxed immune among our neighbors could come in, and they could not be spared from other homes to stay. Rance's strong arms cradled the baby through the agonizing crisis when to be perfectly quiet meant to live. The doctor said Rance saved her.

Then, when the others were better — for none died — and Hope began timidly to peep into our home, I awoke one day feeling very "queer." The last thing I noticed before a great blankness fell upon things around me was Rance, patiently feeding the baby. She reached up and patted his cheek, now wan from weariness and looking more ink spattered than ever, "Dood Rance," she begged, "des' a 'ittle more."

Then the blankness cut me off from all but pain, and when at last I knew things again Rance's turn had come — and he was gone. Both joys and griefs were ended for him.

They would tell me nothing at first. No nurse could be had for him at our house, and the neighbors, who knew nothing of Rance's fidelity, cried out for his removal. I fear he was poorly nursed, but the doctor said he did for him all that he could in that place to which the stricken poor are carried.

But I would that I might have thanked him ere he went. It would have sent his soul out happier.

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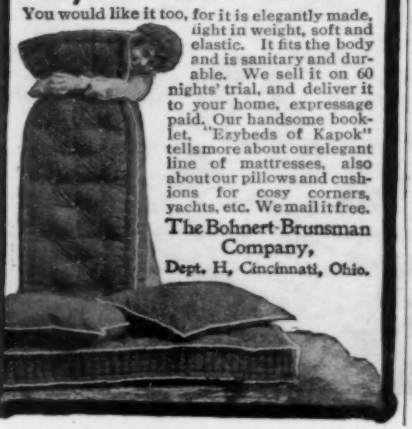

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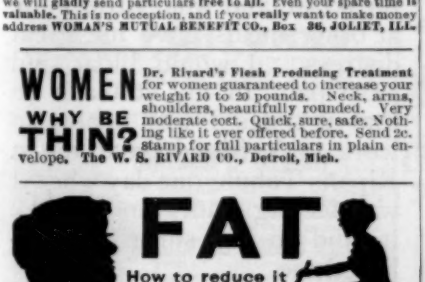

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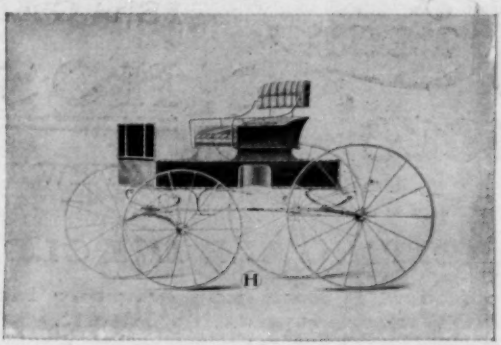

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